

***This Week in Congress***

*May 3, 2010*

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." This week's headlines are:

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## **Debt Commission Should Reduce Government Spending, Not Increase Taxes**

The National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform met this week for the first time. The 18-member panel, which was created in February, has been tasked with making recommendations on how to reduce the nation's massive \$12 trillion debt. This debt threatens our country and the welfare of future generations.

The debt commission should focus its work on the need to reduce federal government spending. We do not have a revenue problem in America; we have a spending problem. More taxes, like the proposed value-added tax, are not the answer. Attempts to raise taxes will only hurt economic recovery and take away more American freedoms. We owe it to our kids and our grandkids to cut spending and get our country back on sound financial footing. I look forward to reviewing the commission's recommendations on cutting spending.

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## **A Strong Postal Service Benefits All Kansans**

Whether in small towns or large cities, Kansans rely on the United States Postal Service (USPS) to stay in touch with family and conduct business. Kansans have a stake in making sure the Postal Service is a viable institution that continues to provide the service they expect. This week, I spoke with Kansans responsible for mail service in our state about the future of the USPS.

**Kansas State Association of Letter Carriers:** On Friday, I spoke with members of the Kansas State Association of Letter Carriers in Topeka about a recent request by the Postmaster General that Congress eliminate the requirement to deliver mail six days a week. While I understand the financial pressures on the Postal Service, I believe the USPS should take all appropriate measures to make sure mail continues to be delivered six days a week. Service cuts only make it more difficult for the USPS to return to financial stability as customers will likely seek other options to meet their mailing needs. Rather than cut service, the Postal Service should look for ways to expand its revenue. Thanks to Rod Holub of Manhattan, the President of the Kansas State Association of Letter Carriers, for the invitation to join Kansas letter carriers at their convention.

**Kansas Chapter of the National Association of Postmasters of the U.S.:** I spoke with members of the Kansas Chapter of the National Association of Postmasters of the U.S. on Sunday in Hays about the importance to Kansans of the more than 600 postal facilities in our state. Post offices are a significant economic contributor in Kansas communities, play a unique role in the social structure of small towns and are a source of civic pride. There are ways to strengthen the financial state of the Postal Service that do not involve closing small and rural post offices or cutting service. Thanks to Tom Lippert of Hays, Legislative Chair for the Kansas Chapter of the National Association of Postmasters of the U.S., for the invitation and his hospitality.

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**Pilot Program to Make Health Care More Accessible to Veterans**

Many veterans live a great distance from a Veterans Affairs (VA) facility, making it difficult for them to access the health care services they need. In 2008, Congress approved a bill I authored to create a pilot program in several regions of the country that will enable rural veterans enrolled in the VA health system to receive care closer to home at a local hospital or physician's office. I have supported the establishment of more VA outpatient clinics across Kansas to improve access and have successfully advocated for increases in veterans' travel reimbursements; yet some rural veterans still lack access to VA health care. The pilot program will help close these gaps.

On Thursday, I participated in a House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health hearing to examine the progress the VA has made toward implementing this pilot program. The VA is currently working through a number of issues, including identifying non-VA health care providers and determining reimbursement methods. Recently, a bill I offered to speed implementation was signed into law. I am told that the VA expects to have this pilot program in place in the winter of 2010 or early 2011. I will continue to work with the VA to make sure that this program is successfully implemented and Kansas veterans get the care they deserve.

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**Working to Keep the IRS out of Health Care and to Reduce Costs**

The new health care reform law, requires the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to make sure all Americans have government-approved health insurance. Americans who can afford health insurance but choose not to purchase it will face a fine of up to \$695 or 2.5% of their income, whichever is higher. The Congressional Budget Office has estimated that it could cost as much as \$10 billion to hire IRS employees to put federally mandated health care plans into effect. This week, I sponsored H.R. 5054, the Prevent IRS Overreach Act, to prohibit the IRS from hiring new agents to enforce the mandates of health care reform.

Additionally, I sponsored H.R. 5126, the Helping Save Americans' Health Care Choices Act. This legislation repeals the tax increases and limitations on Health Savings Accounts (HSAs), Flexible Spending Accounts (FSAs) and Health Reimbursement Accounts (HRAs) contained in the new health care law. High-deductible health plans tied to HSAs are often one of the lowest priced health care insurance options. However, the new law prevents over-the-counter drugs from being reimbursed tax-free from HSAs, HRAs or FSAs starting in 2010, limits annual FSA contributions to \$2,500 starting in 2013, and increases taxes for non-qualifying withdrawals from HSAs in 2011. Tax policy should encourage responsible health care choices, not penalize Kansans that use these medical savings plans.

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## **Agriculture Committee Should Review Impact of EPA Regulations**

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) efforts to regulate greenhouse gas emissions threaten the economic prosperity of all Kansans. This week, I joined Republican members of the House

Agriculture Committee in asking Agriculture Committee Chairman Collin Peterson to hold a hearing to review what impact the EPA's greenhouse gas regulations might have on the agriculture industry. Chairman Peterson and most members of the Agriculture Committee support a disapproval resolution to stop EPA's attempt to regulate greenhouse gas emissions. The Committee should explore how these EPA regulations will increase costs on agricultural producers across the country.

In December, I was the first Member of Congress to introduce a disapproval resolution of EPA's greenhouse gas regulations. Since that time, I have joined with other Members to generate bipartisan support for this initiative. I look forward to the Chairman's response and hope the Committee will address this issue.

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## **Congress Does Not Deserve a Cost-of-Living Adjustment**

In tough times, Kansans expect their government to act like they do—to make sacrifices and cut spending. One of the first places Congress should look to cut spending is the annual cost-of-living increase for Members of Congress. Current law provides automatic annual cost-of-living increases for Members of Congress unless disapproved by Congress. I have long been opposed to this hidden process by which Representatives and Senators get an increase in

their pay. The lack of transparency only serves to increase skepticism, disillusion and distrust of government. This week, I voted for legislation that eliminates the cost-of-living increase for next year and cuts spending. [Click here](#) to read more about this issue. [Click here](#) to read my speech on this topic.

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## **Kansas Businesses Create Jobs and Make Communities Prosper**

When Kansas businesses succeed, jobs are created and our communities are strengthened. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce presented me with the Spirit of Enterprise Award this week for my record of supporting Kansas businesses in 2009. Eligibility for the award was based on my voting record on key legislation impacting businesses. It was an honor to be recognized for my longstanding commitment to Kansas businesses.

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to view a photo of U.S. Chamber of Commerce President, Tom Donohue, presenting me with the award.



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